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## Shared Spaces, Shared Learning: University/Corrections Partnerships that Transform Thinking

Deborah Smith Arthur  
*Portland State University, debs@pdx.edu*

Amy Spring  
*Portland State University, springa@pdx.edu*

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# **Shared Spaces, Shared Learning: University/Corrections Partnerships that Transform Thinking**

Deborah Smith-Arthur and Amy Spring

## **Abstract**

By partnering with correctional facilities, institutions of higher education are well positioned to create shared learning communities that provide profound educational experiences. Portland State University offers several courses involving university/corrections partnerships; these courses meet inside carceral institutions. This article highlights three of these courses and the shared learning spaces they involve. We address the negotiating of these partnerships, development of the courses, and the creation, maintenance and outcomes of these complex learning environments.

## **Keywords:**

Prison education; Community based learning; Engaged learning.

## **Introduction**

Imagine: University students have signed liability releases which delineate the inherent risks of entering a correctional or detention facility, and ask them to wholly assume those risks. In great detail, they have been told what and what not to wear, and they have been carefully advised of the statute making the introduction of contraband into a correctional facility or detention center a felony. Now they are physically at the facility, which will become their classroom for the term. Admonitions from family members or friends perhaps echo in their minds: “Don’t go there! It’s dangerous!” Walking from the parking lot, under the razor wire, and through a locked gate that requires them to be buzzed in so they can enter the institution, makes them wonder what awaits them. A corrections officer asking them to produce their state-issued identification greets them. They sign in and are given a visitor’s badge, and are often asked to acknowledge and sign a statement that, in the event that they are taken as a hostage, no one will negotiate for their release. They are instructed to stow their keys and cell phones in waiting room lockers, two of the many strictly prohibited personal items not allowed in the facility. They pass through the metal detector—sometimes several times, shedding belts, shoes, anything that may contain metal, in front of their colleagues. Occasionally during this disrobing process the officer in charge will publicly admonish students for not adhering to the dress code. Once cleared, students replace all removed items, and move forward, hearing the electronic grind of the heavy sliding door, which lets them inside the institution and into their classroom.

Meanwhile, on the inside, the incarcerated course participants—those living inside the razor wire—are also nervously wondering what’s to come, what to expect. Perhaps their own

colleagues will disparage them as they get the call from staff to head to the education unit. They wonder what college students will think of them; they wonder how they will be perceived. Why do college students bother to come spend time with them? Are they on display? Can they handle the academic work? Will they be judged?

There are a variety of ways to think about shared learning spaces in higher education. Combining residence halls with academic programs, using technology to create virtual learning spaces or online classrooms, and developing frameworks for experiential learning in community settings are all among the various ways that we conceive of shared learning spaces. In this article, we focus on a unique setting for a shared learning space: the implementation of learning communities within carceral institutions involving both incarcerated learners and university students learning together, side by side inside a locked facility. These shared learning spaces bring these seemingly disparate communities of students together in a physical, social and intellectual way, creating a powerful learning community. Through experience we have learned that these spaces have attributes, challenges, and rewards unique to the setting; the restrictive rules and regulations that are layered on this educational setting are like no other learning environment.

The creation and maintenance of a university/corrections partnership, of course, involves negotiating the complex bureaucracy of both institutional bureaucracies. There is growing interest in developing these partnerships as evidenced by the January 2016 publication “Building Effective Partnerships for High-Quality Postsecondary Education in Correctional Facilities” (Vera Institute, 2016). While other types of shared learning spaces might involve partners in the general community, contending with the regulations, needs and logistics of correctional institutions present particular and heightened challenges. Additionally, courses involving learning communities within carceral settings involve students from seemingly very different educational paths and life experiences. This collaboration can be somewhat disorienting, thus also providing potential to be particularly transformative. Close monitoring of and support for the feelings and emotions, as well as the academic learning, of all the students and participants is required. The thorough preparation for the experience, the design of the physical space, the providing of tools and support for engagement across perceived difference, and the creation of opportunities for all students/participants to collaborate together toward a common goal are all important aspects of managing and making the most of this cross-cultural shared learning space.

In this paper we examine the various aspects of shared learning spaces within carceral settings through the lens of three such course offerings at Portland State University. The first, developed by a faculty member who teaches the Juvenile Justice Capstone, involves a partnership with the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, Juvenile Services Division, and with *The Beat Within*, “a publication of writing and art from the inside” of juvenile detention facilities nationwide ([www.beatwithin.org](http://www.beatwithin.org)). This course brings writing and art workshops through *The Beat Within* into the Donald E. Long detention facility in Portland, Oregon. The next course offering, “Women’s Prison Gardens Capstone,” partners with the Oregon Department of Corrections, and specifically the gardening program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, a women’s prison about 40 minutes south of Portland in Wilsonville, Oregon. Through this course, students make three trips to the prison garden to learn gardening skills from the incarcerated women gardeners there. The last course, “Inside Out Prison Exchange: Civic Leadership”

partners with the Oregon Department of Corrections. This course has been offered at both Columbia River Correctional Institution in Portland and Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Students in this course study and practice civic engagement and civic leadership. The correctional facilities where these courses take place are within a driving distance of roughly 45 minutes from the Portland State University campus; their proximity to campus is in large part why the instructors chose these institutions as partners.

### **The Capstone Program’s Curriculum: Making these Courses Possible**

Portland State University is a 50-acre campus situated in downtown Portland, Oregon, that enrolls more than 22,500 undergraduate and 5,600 graduate students. This urban-serving university celebrates its well-known motto “Let Knowledge Serve the City” by animating the student and faculty teaching and research experience with engagement opportunities that bring the campus community into applied teaching and learning settings in partnership with community organizations. In the early 1990s PSU reformed its undergraduate general education requirements to include a six-credit senior-level multi-disciplinary community-based Capstone course (Metropolitan Universities, 2015). Capstones are the culminating experience of the University Studies curriculum, PSU’s innovative general education program. In the Capstone, students and faculty work with community partners collaboratively to respond to a community-faculty identified concern. Each of the courses featured in this article are Capstones, and the students enrolled in these courses are nearing the end of their undergraduate requirements. The aim of the Capstone is for students to demonstrate the sum of their learning through application and engagement with a real problem, working in collaboration with others. All Capstone courses have a community-based learning element, and students are required to work with or on behalf of a community partner. These courses are limited to 18 students, thus allowing for a small seminar-type of learning environment. All of these curricular and administrative elements described above contribute to our ability to develop an educational experience of this type.

### **Physical Space and Tools for Learning and Engagement**

#### Juvenile Justice Capstone

The Juvenile Justice Capstone course partners with the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice (DCJ), specifically the Juvenile Services Division. Portland State University and the Multnomah County DCJ have a mutually beneficial, long-term partnership, of more than twelve years. The Juvenile Services Division of Multnomah County DCJ operates the Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Home (JDH) ([multco.us/dcj-juvenile](http://multco.us/dcj-juvenile)). This facility houses youth, typically ages 12-18, from Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. The majority of youth are being held in detention pre-adjudication, and the average length of stay is 14 days, but youth can spend anywhere from 1– 241 days in the facility. Roughly 60 percent of youth are incarcerated under Oregon’s Ballot Measure 11, requiring automatic waiver to adult criminal court for youth aged 15 and older charged with certain crimes, as well as mandatory minimum sentences upon conviction (ORS 137.700, [multco.us/dcj-juvenile](http://multco.us/dcj-juvenile), n.d.).

Through this Capstone, PSU students bring a writing and art workshop into juvenile detention, through *The Beat Within: A Publication of Writing and Art From the Inside*. The Beat Within has

been in existence for twenty years. Founded in 1996, the program began in almost an impromptu manner, following the death of Tupac Shakur, a famous rapper from the late 1980's and 90's whose music often focused on violence and hardship in inner cities, racism and other social problems. David Inocencio, founder of *The Beat Within*, has commented on how impactful Shakur's death was for many youth, and he wanted to give youth a forum for expressing their feelings. Out of that idea, *The Beat Within* was born (Hilton, 2010). Now *The Beat Within* allows over 5,000 incarcerated youth nationwide the opportunity to reflect and write on the same topics each week, and also to read how others are responding to these same topics. Responses are typed, lightly edited, and sent to the editorial board of *The Beat Within* in San Francisco. A number of pieces are chosen for publication. Printed bi-weekly, the magazine is distributed to a wide variety of stakeholders in the juvenile justice system, including policymakers, judges, attorneys court counselors, and of course, incarcerated youth.

In order to participate in this Capstone, PSU students must complete and pass a background screening through the Multnomah County DCJ. As PSU's 10-week terms means that roughly 15 Capstone students are undergoing the clearance process at DCJ approximately every 12 weeks, this clearance process requires substantial time and resources on behalf of DCJ staff. The strength of the partnership is dependent upon the willingness of DCJ to facilitate this process. However, DCJ also recognizes and appreciates the benefits to their clients and the support of their mission that the partnership with PSU provides. In preparation for facilitating Beat Within workshops, the class tours the detention facility and begins the process of being oriented to the culture of detention. Additionally, the class thoroughly reviews *The Beat Within Volunteer and Training Manual* as well as *Editing Guidelines*. By the third week of the term, students are ready to begin facilitating workshops.

While the incarcerated youth who participate in the workshops do report increased interest in writing, and in reading, the emphasis of the partnership is not on developing youth into polished writers, but instead on positive pro-social engagement between university students and incarcerated youth (Catching, 2013). *The Beat Within* is the vehicle for that engagement. On days when youth may not be interested in participating in the writing or art, for a variety of reasons, students and youth participants engage in a discussion about college or perhaps play a game of dominoes. Even more important than the writing and art produced is the pro-social engagement between the detained youth and the PSU students. After the weekly workshops, Capstone students type and lightly edit each piece of writing, according to specific guidelines provided by *The Beat Within*, and then submit that work to editorial board at *The Beat Within*. Editors at *The Beat* then review the submissions and various pieces are chosen for publication. Additionally, each young person who submits work receives a personalized response from *The Beat Within*.

The shared physical learning space of this course is situated within housing units, or "pods" within the juvenile detention facility. Most of the activities during the day for detained youth, including their learning, eating, recreation, and sleeping, happen within that space. Consequently, this is where the partnership and the engagement with the Capstone class happens as well. Students and detained youth who participate with *The Beat Within* workshops are situated at tables in an open area of the unit. Sitting around these tables, youth participants and college students are in circles together. The dynamic of the circle helps to put all at ease, and to

dismantle any sense of hierarchy. Corrections staff, or “custody service specialists,” are always present. However, over the years of the partnership, trust in the background process and the training has been established, and in fact most custody staff see Capstone as “a part of the culture of detention” (Lefebvre, pers. comm., 2015). Therefore, while remaining present and engaged, most of the facility staff allow Capstone students to lead and run the workshops without interference.

This shared learning space results in differing, yet complementary, outcomes for the various stakeholders. From the perspective of the Department of Community Justice, the Capstone class and *The Beat Within* workshops enhance their mission by “assisting youth in developing creative problem solving skills, empathy, and tools to express emotions appropriately.” (Bolson, pers. comm., 2015). The course provides pro-social engagement and community connections that DCJ staff cannot provide. In fact, the course was recognized with a “Volunteer of the Year” award from Multnomah County in 2011.

For Capstone students, the shared learning space of *The Beat Within* workshops inside juvenile detention offers them an opportunity to examine and transform how they perceive those labeled as juvenile delinquents and how they understand criminal and juvenile justice policy. Through anonymous end-of-term evaluations and reflective writing assignments, students have reported that the experience of working with the youth has changed them profoundly. Specifically, they report having learned that the youth are “brilliant, unique, smart, talented, thoughtful, kind and reflective” which is not how they perceived incarcerated youth prior to the course. Additionally, the experience of working directly with incarcerated youth inside a detention facility situates the academic component of the course within a real and applied context. Just as Paulo Freire advocated “reading the world” as a key pedagogical strategy, this critical place-based educational experience allows students to reflect upon that place (juvenile detention) and has an impact upon their relationship to it (Gruenewald, 2003). Indeed, “...firsthand experience can become an important way to shape an audience’s sensitivity for processing arguments calling for social change regarding the prison-industrial complex...and prepare [students] for a critical examination of incarceration policy” (Hinck et al., 2013, 40).

For the detained youth who participate in *The Beat Within* workshops, engaging weekly with university students leads to a positive sense of community engagement, and conversely, decreased feelings of isolation (Catching, 2013). During the closing circle at the end of each term, in which PSU students, incarcerated youth, and DCJ staff sit together to reflect upon the experience, many youth have expressed that through their engagement with college students, that they are “not forgotten,” and that they are appreciative for the involvement and for the fact that they have been “given a voice.” Shared learning space and engagement with university students provides for growth that extends beyond academic learning and leads to a better sense of belonging and well being.

### Women’s Prison Gardens Capstone

While the Juvenile Justice Capstone utilizes writing and art as a tool for prosocial engagement between college students and young people experiencing incarceration, the Women’s Prison Garden Capstone utilizes gardening as the tool for that engagement. Incarcerated women teach

organic gardening skills to PSU Capstone students, sharing their expertise and skills that they have developed while planting and maintaining the garden inside the prison yard. The physical space of the shared learning happens within the prison, outdoors, in the ½ acre garden area, which was created by the prison gardening program. Oftentimes, all participants are on their knees in the garden together; physically in the dirt. This dynamic is disarming and leads to a shared sense of participation and a sense of equality among participants.

The developer and instructor of this course was already a volunteer with the Department of Corrections, and was instrumental in creating that gardening program. The PSU Capstone program was viewed as a way to expand and sustain the gardening program. The Instructor proposed the offering of the course as an adjunct instructor, and the Capstone Committee, a small group of seasoned Capstone faculty who review all new course proposals, approved it. Her pre-existing relationship with the Department of Corrections made the partnership development between the Department of Corrections and the university relatively uncomplicated.

Gardening programs in prisons can soften the effects of the harsh prison environment while at the same time assisting with preparation for reintegration into society. Exposure to gardening skills offers people experiencing incarceration prosocial tools for self-support and for coping with stress (Lindemuth, 2014). Beyond gardening together, however, the gardening program at CCCF and the partnership with PSU Capstone offers incarcerated women and students both an opportunity to engage with one another as peers. The instructor has noticed that participants also push beyond the stereotypes of one another they may have held previously (Rutt, D., pers. comm., 2016). Again, varying yet complementary learning outcomes are achieved. Despite the fact that in this course students make only handful of visits to the prison throughout the term, this place-based pedagogy makes the academic learning, involving an examination of the experience of women in prison, and the social change related to the prison-industrial complex, more real and impactful for the university students. As indicated through reflective writing and discussion in the course, students find that they have a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges faced by incarcerated women, and their previous course work in their various disciplines becomes more focused and fine-tuned. For the incarcerated women, teaching gardening skills to university students gives them a sense that they indeed have meaningful contributions to make, and also helps them to feel more connected to the world beyond the prison walls. Through her extensive experience with the garden and the course, the Instructor has shared her belief that the garden and the attendant engagement with outsiders creates a healthier environment for everyone there, incarcerated women as well as staff (Rutt, D., pers. comm., 2016).

### Inside Out: Civic Leadership Capstone

The Inside Out: Prison Exchange Civic Leadership Capstone course has been offered once per year for the past 10 years. This course provides an opportunity for a small group of students from PSU, “outside students,” and a small group of residents from a prison within close proximity to PSU, “inside students,” to study and learn together. The shared learning space for the course is physically located within the prison. Each week, “inside students” and “outside students” work together in a structured peer and collaborative learning environment. Students (both inside and outside students) examine their own perceptions about crime and justice, the criminal justice system, and corrections through a policy analysis lens. All students gain a deeper understanding

of the criminal justice system through the marriage of theoretical knowledge and practical experience achieved by meeting together weekly. Students in the class also work together to complete a culminating project, through which they propose a project or policy change that they believe is organizationally viable and would improve the lives of those incarcerated in the facility.

The shared learning space for this course takes place in a classroom space made available to the class within the prison. Higher education courses are not readily available to incarcerated people, yet there is growing recognition and data that educational programs in prison promote safer communities, safer prisons, and are cost effective (Vera Institute, 2016). From the perspective of prison administrators, the course allows college level instruction to be made available to the carceral community without cost to the inside students. The PSU students, however, pay full tuition and bear the cost of instruction, thus making it possible for the instructor to offer the course at the prison as part of their teaching load. The course also provides inside students with regular opportunities to engage with outside community members in ways that reinforce prosocial engagement in an academic community. As confirmed by student reflective assignments and in class conversations, inside students regularly report they feel connected to a larger community of caring and thoughtful people on the outside and feel a sense of confidence as they consider their release that they otherwise would not have gained. Given that the learning community involves college students, and both communities of students complete the same assignments and readings, the shared learning space provides inside students with an opportunity to have the role of student modeled for them by a community of students that are perceived to be academically accomplished (Collier & Morgan, 2008). This modeling reinforces for the inside students that they in fact possess the intellect and skills to perform in a college level course. As with the two previous courses, the shared learning space for the PSU community of students allows them to challenge their assumptions of who incarcerated people are and how the policy practices of incarceration play out in the real lives of real people. The inside and outside students in this class report being moved to rethink their assumptions about the “other” and this often results in them seeing themselves as more alike than different.

Portland State students who enroll in this course are nearing graduation. They have taken dozens of classes on campus over the four plus years of their academic career. They enter the Inside Out Prison Exchange: Civic Leadership course with a sense of confidence that they know how to effectively perform in a college class to learn and be rewarded with a commensurate grade. Many of these college students are drawing on tacit knowledge that they are not even aware that they possess, but that help them perform successfully in their classes (Polanyi, 1966). Although some of the inside students have attended college prior to being incarcerated, the great majority have not or were last in a college class many years prior. Therefore, the inside students in this class are often not able to draw on the same informal and implicit knowledge about how to perform well in a college class as the outside students. In general, the inside students believe that to do well in the class they tend to complete all the assigned reading and follow with precision the assignment guidelines. The attention to detail the inside students bring to the class reading assignments, homework, and class discussions is a regular reminder that preparation and rigorous engagement with the course content is essential in this course.

The class is a highly interactive class where students complete assigned readings and in small groups (of both inside and outside students) facilitate discussion of the readings. There is always a group project in this class where the students complete a community engagement project that results in a change within the prison. Projects have included: (a) setting up an institution-wide recycling program; (b) the introduction of lower calorie, healthier meal options to a system that only offered high carbohydrate, high calorie options; and (c) the establishment of a clothing closet for indigent inmates without access to clothing suitable for life upon release from prison. Students analyze power and resources, and learn and improve proposal writing and presentation skills. All of these course elements build a set of knowledge and skills that civic leaders must master to be effective change agents in their communities. Students repeatedly report they are surprised at how receptive the prison administration is to their ideas and how the power dynamic between prison staff and the class shifts slightly while the class is taking place.

This intensive course provides a life-altering experience that allows the PSU (“outside”) students to re-conceptualize and rethink what they have learned in the classroom, in the media, and through public policy about marginalized, incarcerated communities. In the words of a former outside student, “I have learned to see my inside classmates as individuals and people with hope and dreams like everyone else instead of as their crime. I used to view all individuals in prisons as criminals. Through my experience during this class my view has changed in such a way that I believe will be with me for many years to come” (quote from a reflective assignment, 2008).

Through gaining these insights, this class inspires outside students in a variety of ways. For those who view themselves in future criminal justice careers, through reflective writing assignments it is clear that the experience of spending intensive time with incarcerated people serves to humanize that population. Additionally, as is often reported in reflective papers and in classroom discussion, students in this course develop a desire and a commitment to work towards a more socially just prison system. While further research is warranted, it is at least anecdotally clear to the Instructor that the experience of the course encourages students to pursue employment and community work that leads toward an effective, humane, restorative, criminal justice system. At the same time, the class challenges the incarcerated (“inside”) students to place their life experiences into a larger social context, to develop or rekindle their intellectual self-confidence and interest in further education, and to encourage them to recognize their capacity as agents of change in their own lives, as well as in the broader community.

### **Partnership Development with Corrections Departments**

Partnership development between community organizations and educational institutions that make community-based courses like Capstones possible is never an easy task. An established and growing body of literature details that reciprocal, collaborative, sustained partnerships require the parties involved to invest time and resources in establishing trust, clear and open communication, establishing a set of common goals for the partnership (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2007; Creighton, 2008). Organizational culture and the roles and authority individuals have within their organization influences the development of these partnerships. Kevin Kecskes (2006) reminds us of the importance of understanding the culture of our organization’s “belief system” to effectively employ partnership development strategies. Development of the partnerships with prisons, jails, and detention centers can be

replete with various levels of attendant challenges. The primary concern of locked facilities is safety and security. In large part a high level of investment in restrictive rules and a strong chain of command achieves these goals. Colleges and universities prioritize education over safety and security and often go about achieving this goal in an organizational culture with significantly less structure than most organizations, while locked facilities represent an extreme example at the other end of the spectrum. The general philosophy and supportiveness, or lack thereof, of a particular correctional facility toward educational programming can impact the development of these partnerships. Over the years of developing partnerships with a variety of correctional facilities in Oregon, Portland State University faculty have successfully overcome the seemingly divergent goals and organizational cultures to create these shared space partnerships by addressing some important corrections concerns. The sustained commitment of the teaching faculty and the accompanying curricular structure are essential elements to the success of these partnerships. Recognizing that building a partnership between organizations with very different cultures takes time, knowing that the investment will yield a shared learning environment that will serve many hundreds of students over time makes it completely worthwhile.

### Establishing Trust and Credibility

All partnerships must be based on a foundation of trust. Correctional facilities perceive that having a group of college students come into the facility to take classes with a group of currently incarcerated individuals presents the facility with a level of risk that they are likely not to assume unless they have significant trust in the instructor who leads the class. The instructors who have successfully developed the partnerships that have resulted in these shared spaces for learning, trust and credibility was established through one of three paths:

- A successful partnership was established from an existing relationship the instructor had with the corrections facility;
- An instructor who had existing professional expertise in corrections and that expertise helped facilitate the establishment of the partnership;
- An instructor established a partnership by following the administrative processes that govern the development of new programs at the prison.

Trust for both the Juvenile Justice Capstone and the Women's Prison Garden Capstone was initiated and established because of previous relationships that the faculty had with the community partners, as volunteers and in relation to previous work history. In the case of the Juvenile Justice Capstone, a decade of previous juvenile and criminal law practice allowed the faculty member to access the working relationships within the Department of Community Justice, which operates the juvenile detention facility where the course is based. Based on those pre-established relationships, it was fairly easy to navigate the correct protocols for development of the educational partnership. The mission of the Donald E Long detention center is "to create and maintain a safe, secure, stable, and enriching environment for juveniles in our care, while protecting the community" (<https://multco.us/dcj-juvenile>). Additionally, Multnomah County Juvenile Detention is one of the four original local model sites established through the Annie E Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) ([www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/jdai/](http://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/jdai/)). Multnomah County was one of the earliest sites to implement the JDAI. Part of the strategy of the JDAI is to improve the conditions of

confinement. Partnering with Portland State University to participate in the writing and art workshops offered through The Beat Within fits nicely within both the mission of the DCJ and the strategies implemented through the JDAI. Therefore, DCJ was very welcoming to the idea of the partnership with Portland State University, and the Juvenile Justice Capstone course.

As mentioned above, an instructor who enjoyed an established relationship with Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and the Oregon Department of Corrections developed the Women's Prison Gardens Capstone. Prior to developing her course, the instructor was working with the facility manager at the women's prison to revive the prison garden and to develop the gardening program at the prison. That established relationship helped a great deal with developing the partnership between the Department of Corrections and PSU for facilitation of the Women's Prison Gardens Capstone. The initial motivation for the development of the course grew out of a felt need at Coffee Creek, a need to engage more volunteers in the gardening program as a means to launch the program and sustain it over time. PSU's reputation for strong community engagement, and the Capstone Program's community-based learning pedagogical approach, made the Program a logical and creative place to turn for increased volunteer involvement.

The Inside-Out: Civic Leadership Capstone class was created and offered by an instructor without a prior relationship with the prison system and without a professional background in criminal justice or corrections. The prison where this course was initially offered was not responding to an expressed need. In fact the prison was not terribly motivated or interested in launching additional educational programs. All of these elements made cultivating this partnership difficult. Given these significant barriers, trust and credibility were hard-won and ultimately established by navigating the administrative structures that govern and guide the adoption of new programs at the Department of Corrections (DOC). The instructor of this course developed a proposal and presentation that was submitted to the Director of Education at DOC. That Director had a vested interest in trying to offer educational programs uniformly throughout all facilities managed by the DOC. Obtaining state level approval for the course signaled to the local prison facility that the DOC Education Director was in support and was giving them license to take the "risk" associated with offering a course of this type. The requisite approval at the state level followed by approval at the local prison proved to be an important sequence that moved the partnership forward. With course approval established, the instructor also was required to participate in the rigorous 60-hour Inside Out Prison Exchange Program training to help inform teaching practices within a corrections setting (<http://www.insideoutcenter.org/training-institute.html>). The instructor was also required to have her class supervised by a corrections staff member for a probationary period. These essential phases of development allowed the instructor to establish credibility within the institution. While certainly a more onerous process than experienced in the development process of the previous two Capstones highlighted here, nevertheless partnership and course development was indeed possible and ultimately successful.

*Security Concerns.* Correctional facilities are rightfully highly concerned with safety and security. Bringing a group of college students into the facility repeatedly over the course of 10 weeks presents corrections staff with multiple concerns. These concerns include the potential problem of people experiencing incarceration building lasting, personal relationships with college students. The DOC does not want classes of this type to be the venue where inmates and college students develop lasting personal and possibly romantic relationships. They view these

kinds of relationships as potentially coercive and present increased opportunities for the exchange of contraband, both safety and security taken very seriously in corrections. The Oregon DOC has a system-wide training that is required of all of their volunteers, and instructors must complete this training before being allowed to teach inside. Additionally, the DOC has established a rule that all instructors leading educational courses of this type must be trained and certified Inside-Out instructors. Inside-Out training is a one-week professional development program facilitated by the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, located in Philadelphia at Temple University. Trainings are also offered in varying locations. The training guides instructors in teaching practices within a correctional facility that involves pedagogical techniques as well as tools to employ to prevent security breaches in carceral facilities. Dealing with these concerns directly through professionally led programs is an essential part of establishing and sustaining the partnership.

Of course the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice (DCJ) is also concerned with safety and security, and in addition, with confidentiality. Prior to conducting workshops, Capstone students engage in training regarding the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA), the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), as well as all Multnomah County rules and regulations relating to juvenile detention. Capstone students are screened each time they enter the facility, and Custody Services Specialists are always present on the units during workshops. Confidentiality is maintained by using only first names.

*Staffing and Space Issues.* Developing a partnership that results in an effective shared learning environment requires that the use of corrections staff - DOC or DCJ - and facilities resources be considered. With the DCJ, education and the creation of an enriching environment for youth is part of their mission. Thus, resources devoted to the partnership are considered well utilized. The DOC, on the other hand, does not mention education in its mission. Therefore, one barrier to successfully setting up a partnership of this kind can be the concern that the course will consume already limited staff time and classroom space for “non-essential” programming. The instructors of the Inside Out: Civic Leadership Capstone and the Women’s Prison Garden Capstone have both successfully navigated this concern by becoming trained volunteers of the DOC, completing all the necessary protocols. The volunteer status they enjoy requires an investment of time, but once that status is achieved the instructors are able to perform some duties that would otherwise fall to the DOC staff and be in the position to contribute to the sustained the management of these courses overtime.

Securing access to space within the correctional facility can also be a barrier to establishing these partnerships. The instructors of these courses have used flexibility as a tool to overcome this issue. Flexibility in the types of classroom they are able to turn into a shared learning environment as well as flexibility in the time the course is offered. Partnership success is enhanced when DOC staff sees that the instructors are willing to take responsibility for support and management of the course and maintain flexibility.

*Funding and Sustainability.* The business model for this partnership is quite simple. As with all Capstone courses (and there are roughly 60 to choose from), all three of these courses fulfill the senior level general education requirement for PSU students. Courses are fully enrolled with 16-18 tuition-paying students. For the Inside Out: Civic Leadership Capstone course, as long as the

instructor is willing to offer the course at the correctional facility and willing to double their course enrollment with inside students, the University is willing to allow the course to be offered as part of the instructor's teaching responsibilities. The majority of inside students do not have the funds to pay for the course credit. Those inside students who enroll often take the course for their own personal growth and do not receive college credit. There has been a move at Portland State to secure funding to support differential tuition rates for inside students, which would allow inside students to take these courses for credit at more affordable rates. There is an intention to secure funding for inside student enrollment and to help sustain the partnerships with these correctional facilities, but to date it remains an element of the partnership that is unfunded. For the Juvenile Justice Capstone and Women's Prison Gardens Capstone, the workshops and gardening, respectively, are part of PSU students' community-based learning requirement as part of their Capstone course. The required academic component of the course, an addition to the community based learning component, does happen on the PSU campus, and incarcerated participants are not involved in that academic component of the course. Therefore, these courses are a regular part of the instructors' teaching loads.

### **Faculty and Student Preparation**

As with all teaching, knowing and understanding place and the context is of utmost importance. In these shared learning spaces, it is critical to a successful experience for all involved that the instructor is well prepared to teach on the inside. While faculty may be very well prepared in their discipline, this alone does *not* make them prepared to teach inside correctional settings (Matthews, 2000). On the contrary, a second and perhaps more important factor in preparation is gaining an understanding of how teaching inside carceral institutions is different than teaching in a classroom, or in the community, on the outside. This factor is critical to the success of the students/participants and the course experience overall, and perhaps even to the continuance of the education program inside the facility. Significant differences include: limited or no access to technology, limited or no communication with students between face-to-face class meetings, power differential between those students who are able to come and go each class period and those who are incarcerated and must remain in the facility when class ends, race and class differences among the students, and the limited power the instructor has within the facility. Specific and focused training experiences are helpful in preparing the faculty to gain clarity on how to deal with these unique elements of this shared learning space on the inside.

As highlighted above, The Inside Out Prison Exchange Program offers a 60-hour training program designed to prepare faculty to teach college level courses on the inside (see [www.insideoutcener.org](http://www.insideoutcener.org)). While this training- perhaps the most structured and organized such training of its kind currently offered nationally, is helpful, it by itself does not prepare someone for success in teaching in this setting. Spending as much time as possible inside detention and correctional facilities by becoming a volunteer and/or through participating in trainings offered on the inside, becoming familiar with criminal and juvenile justice laws and policies in the relevant state, such as mandatory minimum sentencing law and laws impacting waiver of juveniles to adult court are also essential to good teaching in this setting.

In his paper "Developing a Prison Education Pedagogy", Tony Gaskew (2015) argues that community colleges, rather than four year institutions, may be better suited to this work of post-

secondary education inside carceral institutions. He cites the physical proximity of community colleges to penal institutions, the lower cost of community colleges, and finally a critical cultural advantage that community colleges have over four year institutions, in that they have a more diverse student body. Noting that of the 2.2 million people incarcerated nationwide 40 percent are black males, Gaskew argues, and we agree, that understanding and accounting for the “pedagogical racial gap” does matter (68-69). Gaskew proposes the “humiliation to humility perspective,” or the HHP. According to Gaskew, the HHP expands the pedagogical discussion of the “invisible three-dimensional elephant inside the prison classroom: Racism, White supremacy, and White privilege, by incorporating the narrative truths of the *lived* experiences of incarcerated Black males” (71). Having an awareness of and an understanding of this ‘invisible three-dimensional elephant’ certainly better prepares an instructor to be effective in this shared learning space.

In addition to delivering and exploring relevant content in a compelling and non-racist way to a diverse student group, faculty in these shared learning spaces need to be caring and compassionate with each student and with the classroom community as a whole, in order for a successful shared learning to develop. A faculty person who is perceived as “caring and compassionate” is going to be most effective in this type of shared learning space (Mageehon, 2006). Students in these classes have a wide variety of confidence and skill levels at performing academically; a gentle approach that allows all students to establish a voice in the classroom is essential to building a learning community where students can enlighten each other on the topics addressed (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Faculty members also need to be creative. It is unlikely that the technology that many (most?) are now accustomed to teaching with will be available in the learning space inside the detention or correctional facility. Thinking through class sessions, content delivery, and assignments becomes a different process than many instructors have taken-for-granted in teaching outside of carceral settings (McCarty, 2006).

Just as faculty should undertake all opportunities to prepare themselves for the experience of teaching inside carceral settings, it is essential that all students and participants, coming from both inside the carceral settings and outside, are well-prepared to enter the shared learning space. In most cases, in order to successfully create the space that will be the learning environment for the term, separate sessions with participants who are students outside of the facility and with students or participants who are incarcerated on the inside is helpful, and, in the case of the Inside Out program, is required. There are many logistics and details to cover, including transportation, facility rules, starting to gain a familiarity with the culture of a carceral setting or of a college classroom, to name a few. This initial orientation meeting is also a time when the facilitator begins to create “...an atmosphere of trust in which students can be comfortable and engaged, ready to enter the group process and take responsibility for their own learning” (Pompa, 2004). Understanding of context and place is important for faculty and for students who engage in any community based learning, and these shared learning spaces are no exception.

## **Conclusion**

Once all the various steps and hurdles described above have been handled and overcome, and all arrangements and preparations have been made, these shared learning spaces hold tremendous potential to provide transformative learning for all involved. Of course, research points to

educational opportunities for incarcerated people as being instrumental in reducing recidivism (Davis et al., 2014; Vera Institute, 2016). Even beyond the education, however, participating in intellectual and academic pursuits in collaboration with university and college students offers to inside participants/students an opportunity to develop and recognize their own sense of competence and self-efficacy (Allred et al., 2013). The dismantling of assumptions and the reflection that is an integral part of these shared learning spaces can help all students and participants alike to build and develop a habit of connection and reflection that will be supportive of familial and community relationships in the future (Catching, 2013).

The transformative quality of these courses is in part achieved through the magic created in the shared learning environment. In sharp juxtaposition to their worries at the start of the experience, students are often surprised at how, in a relatively short period of time, they have been moved intellectually, emotionally, and interpersonally (J. Gardner, personal communication). The learning environment is challenging and stimulating and the time always passes too quickly. At the end of an individual class session, students are surprised when the instructor, reminded not-so-subtly by corrections staff, lets students know that it is time to wrap up and to exit the shared learning space. Much is left undone, and it is not uncommon for students to leave with already building anticipation for the next session together. Students often remain unsettled when the last class of the term creeps up, even though at the first class meeting the instructor foreshadows the end of the class and warns that it will come all too soon. Students are informed that although they do not know each other, over the weeks the class meets they will come to know one another and will be sad when they have to say goodbye. At the start, students typically find this hard to imagine and largely do not believe that when they are required to say goodbye at the last class meeting there will be tears shed. In the last emotional moments of this course, because of safety and privacy concerns, students are reminded that they are not to have contact with one another after the conclusion of the class. Reminding them of this abrupt fact often inspires the students to share what the class has meant to them, and often students will include a story of a particular moment in the class that stood out as significant to them. A shared learning community has been built where and with whom it had not been expected. In many ways, liberation has occurred—liberation of thinking, and of assumptions. This liberation could only have occurred in communion together, and it is our hope that this sense of liberation each term will indeed be a step toward the dismantling of the larger prison industrial complex.

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## **Author Information**

Deborah Smith Arthur, M.A., J.D., developed and teaches the Juvenile Justice Capstone, and has been teaching Capstones at PSU in the area of juvenile justice since 2003. She is a former criminal defense attorney, specializing in representing juveniles in adult criminal court, and she is passionate about the intersection of juvenile and criminal justice and educational equity and access.

Deborah Smith Arthur, M.A., J.D.  
Assistant Professor  
University Studies Program  
Portland State University  
1721 SW Broadway

Cramer Hall 117  
Portland, OR 97201  
Email: [debs@pdx.edu](mailto:debs@pdx.edu)  
Telephone: 503-725-5831

Amy Spring is the Community Research and Partnership Director, in which she works with PSU students, faculty, staff, and community partners to facilitate and support the growth of community partnerships. She has spent a significant part of her career working on institutional change efforts related to engagement, while also facilitating faculty and student workshops focused on community engagement and coordinating recruitment of students and faculty to participate in applied community-based teaching.

Amy Spring  
Community Research and Partnerships Director  
Portland State University  
Market Center Building, Suite 620  
1600 SE 4th Ave.  
Portland OR 97201  
Telephone: 503/725-5582